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**Social Capital and Development in Chernobyl-affected areas of  
Ukraine: the Impact of CIDA**

**ABSTRACT**

This paper offers several insights into how the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) influenced the development of poor Ukrainian rural communities affected by the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station that took place in April 25-26, 1986. It provides evidence about the degree to which CIDA-supported community-driven development strategies work, and the effects of social capital on individual's own development and community sustainability.

The Chernobyl accident was the greatest industrial disaster in the history of humankind, released one hundred times more radiation than the atom bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and it affected the lives of millions of people. It resulted in significant exposures to substantial numbers of the populations of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine and to parts of some European countries. In Ukraine, affected territories include 53,454 sq. km (7% of its total territory); 512,000 ha of arable lands and 492,000 ha of forests are unusable; 2.3 million people (754,934 children under age of 14) were affected; more than 163,000 people evacuated and resettled. Expert estimation of total economic losses for Ukraine up to date is about USD 150 billion; 7% of the total national budget goes to Chernobyl-related expenditures.

The negative health situation in Chernobyl-affected communities is exacerbated by the severed sense of community that has resulted from the disaster in 1986. For those who remain in contaminated areas, poverty parallels great uncertainty about the continued effects of radiation exposure. Among people who were forcibly relocated from the most severely affected areas, many have found it difficult to adapt to new surroundings, to find new work and

get on with prosperous lives. Moreover, a general sense of fatalism, apathy and hopelessness pervades and people have lost their sense of individual and community pride. Therefore, it is crucial to support the affected communities in developing self-governing community organizations.

In the light of the UN Millennium Development Goals, CIDA was the first donor for the United Nations Development Program / Chernobyl Recovery and Development Program in Ukraine with USD 1.160 million contributed to support the Government of Ukraine in its efforts to mitigate the lasting social, economic and environmental consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, and to build more secure and prosperous living conditions and to promote sustainable human development for large numbers of people living in contaminated areas where they receive elevated radiation exposure.

It sought to create social capital in Chernobyl-affected communities by stimulating social mobilization as a tool for collective action. In the same vein, it helps to pool resources and build solidarity required to resolve common problems and to work towards community advancement.

CIDA supported the process that empowers women and men to organize their own self-governing communities which enable them to initiate and control their own personal and communal development, as opposed to mere participation in an initiative designed by the government or an external organization.

Years of experience exist and sufficient documentation is available to prove that CIDA-supported community-driven development strategies in rural Ukraine are an effective tool in developmental work. For example, there are tangible improvements in living conditions; people are able to solve common problems together and overcoming the culture of dependency as a Soviet legacy, and moving from “exclusion to inclusion”. CIDA assisted in establishing of 90 COs in 63 villages (over 10,000 members), increasing in community contributions to the development projects to 22 percent of total costs and developing the partnership between communities, authorities and international organizations. To illustrate, consider a community managed health center project. In order to build the center a newly established community has to develop a reasonable timeline, find partners and findings (donors provide only 30 percent of the total project costs while a community has to find the remaining costs), administer transparent financial procedures, do all the construction work and facilitate day-to-day management of the center. Therefore, a single development project has multiple effects on community as it mobilizes social and other recourses of its members.

Initially not all inhabitants of the 112 Ukrainian villages involved in CIDA-supported development projects wished to participate in the process; they preferred to wait and see. Leaders of a village often had to demonstrate that the self-help capability of community members can be mobilized and that it would lead to the successful completion of projects. As a result, 92 communities have begun to implement the independent projects; addressing issues such as village gas supply, street cleaning, wells and water pipe repairing, road renovation and cemetery development.

Based on positive experience, the benefits of community participation for rural populations include: greater transparency, better self-governance, lower cost of development projects for the state budget, increased ownership, and partnership in a development process with not only CIDA but also with any development organization. Therefore, both being involved in community activities and having a network of social connections have been shown to contribute to an individual's own development and community sustainability. CIDA support and development strategies were the catalysts for community participation, and eventually will lead to favorable socio-economic conditions in the Chernobyl-affected areas of Ukraine.

By contrast, communities within the same or neighboring village that have not joined CIDA projects reported less collective action. Although further research is needed to improve on evaluative approaches, this study provides evidence that CIDA-supported initiatives do reach communities in difficult economic circumstances. Furthermore, development projects affect the services available to rural population.

Finally, at least in the communities that became involved more recently, the community participation bolsters their ability to address local needs. These effects suggest that CIDA activities are a useful tool for facilitating Canadian assistance overseas to improve the quality of life in Chernobyl-affected communities in Ukraine and for implementing development projects.

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